

THE “COMMUNITY SERVICES” COURSE THROUGH DISTANCE EDUCATION: Evaluation of Primary School Students

Dr. A. Nurhan SAKAR

Dr. Oznur OZTURK

Anadolu University,

Open Education Faculty, Eskisehir, TURKEY

ABSTRACT

In 2006, following the Bologna Process, Turkish Council of Higher Education (YÖK) adopted a resolution and changed the curriculum of teacher training higher education institutions. This curriculum revision introduced a new course called 'Community Service' which aims to raise students' awareness of their responsibilities as individuals to the community in which they live. Through this course, students are expected to realize individuals can make a difference by volunteering to share their knowledge and skills with the community. This study presents one application of Community Service course. This application is of interest because it was researched whether the course achieved its aim by evaluating the satisfaction level of primary school students at whose schools English survey courses given within the scope of Open Education Faculty Distance English Language Teaching (DELT) Program.

Keywords: Distance Learning, Community Service Course, Distance English Language Teaching Program (DELT).

INTRODUCTION

Turkey, as one of the participating countries working to create the European Higher Education Area, has also placed an emphasis on the role and responsibilities of higher education institutions to their community. As we know, one purpose of higher education institutions is to serve the community. Therefore YÖK revised the curriculum of 4-year teacher training programs in accordance with the Bologna Process (Yavuz & Şakar, 2009). There are several declarations both in Europe and United States of America such as Bologna Declaration (1988), Strasbourg Declaration (2006) and Presidents' Fourth of July Declaration (1999) which emphasize the importance of higher education institutions' role in improving the quality of community life. To achieve this goal, higher education institutions need to engage with their communities through administrators, faculty, staff and students (Yavuz & Şakar, 2009). Wade (1997) states that community service teaches the youth how to work voluntarily and how they gain a strong citizenship consciousness with the activities they involve.

Here in this study, it was researched that at which level the defined aims were accomplished with senior students' required "Community Service Course" at Open Education Faculty the Distance English Language Teaching (DELT) Program starting from 2008–2009 academic year.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The DELT Program and Community Service Course

The DELT program, which began to admit students in 2000 in accordance with the protocol signed between the Ministry of Education and Anadolu University, is unique in that it is a blended program whereby the first two years are face-to-face and the last two years are through distance education. In the DELT program, students in their 3rd and 4th years generally live in their hometowns, thus in any one of the 81 cities in Turkey as the 3rd and 4th year courses are through distance education.

The distance education is supported by asynchronous on-line courses. The curriculum of the DELT is comparable to that of face-to-face teacher training programs (Yavuz & Şakar, 2009). With the approval of the Council of Higher Education, the implementation of the revised curriculum in the DELT program began in 2008-2009 academic year. Thus, Community Service, a 4th year course, is offered for the first time 2008-2009 academic years. The Community Service Course is designed;

- to comprehend the individual and social benefits of servicing to the community;
- to define the areas of community service;
- to develop the community service skills;
- to arrange activities for special purposes;
- to see how to use the acquired knowledge for the benefit of community;
- to raise the consciousness of servicing without expecting any personal gain.

The aim of Community Service Course is to bring the below mentioned qualities in the senior students of the DELT program. When they complete course, they should be able to;

- comprehend the individual and social benefits of servicing to the community;
- realize the subjects of community servicing;
- arrange activities for community servicing;
- develop their skills of community servicing through various activities;
- improve themselves by sharing their experiences with their friends and instructors;
- decide how to use their knowledge for community servicing as a candidate English teacher.

A protocol was signed between the Ministry of National Education and Anadolu University on 11th of July, 2008 in order to perform Open Education Faculty the DELT Program Community Service Course at primary schools. According to the protocol, it was planned to give survey course after the school hours at primary schools giving full time education (to the students of 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th years) for 25 weeks (an education year) by the DELT Program senior students. This project had number of motivations. The proposal was to have our candidates' teacher to do English tutorials in primary schools in low-income neighborhoods. The reason for this proposal was that in Turkey 6th, 7th and 8th grade students are required to take a centralized exam at the end of each year which includes English as one of the subject areas to be tested. Graduates of primary schools are placed in secondary schools based on the cumulative scores received on the three exams.

Therefore, most students take private lessons and/or tutorials to improve their knowledge and skills to receive higher scores on these exams. Because they are 185

expensive, children from low income families cannot afford to take private lessons or tutorials.

Moreover, because the parents of these children are not well educated, they cannot help their children with school work. Thus, those students are at a disadvantage in such a competitive system. Providing English tutorials to those students, who cannot otherwise receive additional guidance, would foster equal education opportunity for low income students. The best way to reach those students is through the schools which they attend (Yavuz & Şakar, 2009). In addition to this aim; if it was approved, making activities with students in order to endear English lessons was included to the plans.

- Preparing a year-end stage play,
- Bringing in the habit of reading English story books,
- Watching educating and entertaining cartoons or children movies in English,
- Playing English language games (such as scrabble, hang-man)

THE AIM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to define whether "Community Service Course" given at the 4th year of Anadolu University Open Education Faculty the DELT Program, which gives open and distance education within the Turkish Higher Education System, reached its designated aim or not and to contribute the planning of new strategies for more efficient usage of this course in the following academic years. With the study which was performed to accomplish this aim, the satisfaction level of primary school students related with the survey course given within the scope of Community Service Course was determined and the differences of the satisfaction levels based on the differences of participating classes were defined.

Thus these differences will be used when making decisions about the performance of "Community Service Course" and the performance will be more efficient. This study have importance; because it will contribute to the development of "Community Service Course".

METHOD

The Model of the Study

The study is descriptive; because it defines the current position within the concept of its aim.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of all the students attending survey course given by the DELT Program senior students at 230 primary schools in 2008-2009 academic year. The total number of the primary school students attending survey courses in 65 cities is 10.383. The data gathered by complete inventory is used in the study.

Data Collection

In this study, the data was gathered by questionnaires. Primary school students participated a questionnaire consisting of 21 questions. In the first part of the questionnaire, the students were asked questions about the activities and their opinions about these activities. In the second part, students were asked questions concerning their demographic information. The resulting data was analyzed with PASW Statistics 18 package program.

FINDINGS

Demographic Questions

Questionnaire was applied in 65 cities, at 230 primary schools on 10.383 students. 25.8% of the students were 11, 24.9% were 12 and 19. 6% were 13 years old (see. Table 1).

Table: 1 Age

		n	%
Valid	10	1800	17,5
	11	2646	25,8
	12	2552	24,9
	13	2014	19,6
	14+	1253	12,2
	Total	10265	100,0
Missing	0	118	
Total		10383	

71.3% of the students participating in the questionnaire were 4th, 5th and 6th year students; 28,7% were 7th and 8th year students (see.Table 2).

**Table: 2
Year**

	Year	N	%
Valid	4th	2257	22,0
	5th	2499	24,4
	6th	2546	24,9
	7th	1818	17,8
	8th	1120	10,9
	Total	10240	100,0
Missing	0	143	
Total		10383	

59.3% of the students participating in the questionnaire was female, 40.7% was male (see.Table 3).

Table: 3
Gender

		N	%
Valid	Female	5959	59,3
	Male	4089	40,7
	Total	10048	100,0
Missing	0	335	
Total		10383	

Primary school students were asked to mark the activities that they performed in survey course. Primary school students mostly marked the activity of "doing their daily homework" (83, 7%). Other answers were as in the follows;

- "the activity of watching educating and entertaining movies in English" (50, 6%),
- "the activity of reading English books" (48,7%) and
- "the activity of preparing a year-end stage play in English" (8,3%) (Table 4).

Table: 4
Activities Performed in the Survey Course

	n	%
Doing daily homework	8693	83,7
Watching educating and entertaining movies in English	5250	50,6
Reading English books	5060	48,7
Preparing a year-end stage play in English	863	8,3

Students Opinions About the English Survey Course

- 94% of the primary school students attending to the survey course stated that lessons contributed to their knowledge of English,
- 90, 1% of them stated that survey course increased their success in English lessons.
- The families of 93, 8% of the students wanted their children to attend the courses.
- 93, 9% of the students stated that the candidate teacher had always answered their questions,
- 93, 4% of them stated that the attitude of the candidate teacher towards them was positive and constructive and
- 89, 3% of them stated that they made their homework with the help of the candidate teachers and these studies increased their success.
- 88, 9% of them stated that they would attend the course again in the following school year.

Table: 5
Opinions About the Survey Course

	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
They created the opportunity to read English story books	5812	56,5	1804	17,5
Reading English story books taught me new vocabularies; so my vocabulary knowledge developed	7886	76,3	902	8,7
They created the opportunity to watch educating and entertaining movies in English	6060	58,7	1704	16,5
Watching English movies developed my English pronunciation skills	6325	61,3	1513	14,7
Watching English movies developed my listening and comprehension skills	6424	62,5	1344	13,1
They created the opportunity to play language games	8829	85,4	840	8,1
Playing language games developed my English knowledge	9021	87,4	754	7,3
Survey course supported the development of my English knowledge	9712	94,0	509	4,9
If survey courses are planned for the next year, I would attend them again	9155	88,9	1087	10,6
My participation in survey course pleased my family	9673	93,8	560	5,4
I attended to the survey course by force	853	8,3	9296	90,3
Survey course were just a waste of time	2148	20,9	7997	77,7
My success in English course increased	9274	90,1	1015	9,9
The attitude of the DELT Program candidate teacher towards us was very constructive	9612	93,4	678	6,6
With the help of the DELT Program candidate teacher, I made my homework and became more successful	9196	89,3	1098	10,7
I always received answers from the questions I asked to the DELT Program candidate teacher	9649	93,9	628	6,1

Students said that among the activities performed at survey course;

- playing language games improved their English knowledge (87, 4%),
- reading English story books taught them new vocabularies (76, 3%),
- watching movies in English developed their pronunciation (61, 3%) as well as listening and comprehension (62, 5%) skills.
- 20, 9% of the students thought that the survey course were a waste of time and
- 8, 3% of them said that they attended these lessons by force (see.Table5).

The students were asked an open ended question to write their opinions and suggestions. This question was answered by 46, 4% of primary school students. When the answers were categorized;

- 38, 9% of the primary school students liked the courses "very much",
- 22% of them "liked the candidate teacher very much",
- 12, 6% of them "developed their success and English vocabulary knowledge",
- 6, 2% of them "found the courses entertaining and educating",
- 4% of them "wanted to play games and watch movies in English",
- 2, 6% of them "wanted longer survey course hours",
- 2, 4% of them "thought that the survey course should be more entertaining",
- 2, 1% of them "thought that the variety of English story books and the technical equipments of the classrooms should be better",
- 1, 8% of them "liked English lessons thanks to the survey course" and
- 1, 5% of them "found survey course inefficient and got bored" (see.Table6).

Table: 6
The Opinion and Suggestions of Students Participating to the Questionnaire

	n	%
I'm very pleased	1872	38,9
I liked the candidate teacher very much	1058	22,0
My success and English vocabulary knowledge increased	605	12,6
Survey courses were entertaining and educating	298	6,2
I want to watch movies in English and read English story books	195	4,0
I'd like to have more survey course hours	126	2,6
Survey course should be more entertaining	115	2,4
The variety of English story books and the technical equipments of the classrooms should be better	100	2,1
I liked English lessons thanks to the survey course	85	1,8
Survey course were inefficient, I was bored	74	1,5
Other	288	5,8
Total	4816	100,0

Chi-Square test was applied in order to define whether there was a difference between the opinions of students based on the classes that they attended.

As a result of the Chi-Square test; there was a 95% of difference on confidence level between the opinions and classes of the students (see. Table7).

Table: 7
Examination of the differences based on the classes with χ^2 analysis

	χ^2	df	p
They created the opportunity to read English story books	32,754	8	0,000
Reading English story books taught me new vocabularies; so my vocabulary knowledge developed	81,872	8	0,000
They created the opportunity to watch educating and entertaining movies in English	63,399	8	0,000
Watching English movies developed my English pronunciation skills	101,718	8	0,000
Watching English movies developed my listening and comprehension skills	140,723	8	0,000
They created the opportunity to play language games	84,475	8	0,000
Playing language games developed my English knowledge	87,389	8	0,000
Survey courses supported the development of my English knowledge	83,369	8	0,000
If survey courses are planned for the next year, I would attend them again	99,359	8	0,000
My participation in survey courses pleased my family	28,193	8	0,000
I attended to the survey course by force	37,154	8	0,000
Survey courses were just a waste of time	37,165	8	0,000
My success in English lesson increased	96,729	4	0,000
The attitude of the DELT Program candidate teacher towards us was very constructive	35,006	8	0,000
With the help of the DELT Program candidate teacher, I made my homework and became more successful	114,311	8	0,000
I always received answers from the questions I asked to the DELT Program candidate teacher	17,794	8	0,023

When we compare the answers of the students given to the open ended questions and to the questions related with their classrooms, it was seen that;

- **none of the 8th year students stated they liked English thanks to the survey courses**

On the other hand;

- **8th year students demanded to multiply the survey course hours more than the other classes.**
- **5th year students wanted to play English games and to watch movies in English more than the other classes.**
- **Mostly 7th and 8th year students stated that they found the courses inefficient and boring when compared with the other classes (see. Table 8).**

Table: 8
Opinions and Suggestions of the Students Based on Their Classes

	4 th Year		5 th Year		6 th Year		7 th Year		8 th Year	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I'm very pleased	425	37,7	481	39,8	496	39,0	360	43,4	93	27,4
I liked the candidate teacher very much	296	26,3	259	21,4	268	21,1	153	18,5	72	21,2
My success and English vocabulary knowledge increased	116	10,3	141	11,7	149	11,7	132	15,9	61	17,9
Survey course were entertaining and educating	62	5,5	57	4,7	105	8,3	31	3,7	43	12,6
I want to watch movies in English and read English story books	37	3,3	72	6,0	48	3,8	29	3,5	5	1,5
I'd like to have more survey course hours	18	1,6	46	3,8	31	2,4	8	1,0	22	6,5
Survey courses should be more entertaining	19	1,7	21	1,7	38	3,0	26	3,1	11	3,2
The variety of English story books and the technical equipments of the classrooms should be better	26	2,3	37	3,1	24	1,9	9	1,1	4	1,2
I liked English lessons thanks to the survey course	39	3,5	22	1,8	15	1,2	8	1,0	0	0,0
Survey courses were inefficient, I was bored	15	1,3	16	1,3	20	1,6	17	2,1	6	1,8
Other	73	6,5	57	4,7	78	6,0	56	6,7	23	6,7
Total	1126	100	1209	100	1272	100	829	100	340	100

CONCLUSION AND PROPOSITIONS

Community Service Course given within the scope of Open and Distance Education helped primary school students by supporting them on their English homework at survey courses performed by Open Education Faculty the DELT Program candidate teachers. This study was a valuable opportunity for students not being supported efficiently by their families or any other sources.

Thanks to the survey courses, students gained experiences by watching educating and entertaining English movies and by reading English books. Students stated that they learnt new vocabularies while reading English books and they improved their pronunciation, listening and comprehension skills by watching English movies. Survey courses enabled students doing activities which weren't included to their curriculum.

Students had a chance to improve their English knowledge by playing language games. Students also enjoyed English and their success in learning English increased.

As a result of the research; most of the students stated that they would attend survey courses in the following education year.

Students indicated that they liked the Open Education Faculty the DELT Program candidate teacher and thanks to them their success increased by doing homework under their supervision.

7th and 8th year students stated that their survey courses were inefficient and they got bored. On the other hand 8th year students demanded to multiply the number of survey course hours. It was thought that students made this demand due to the Placement Test concerns. Survey courses were given for free in the low-income neighborhoods. Therefore; they had been an opportunity for the children coming from low-income families. In addition these courses supported students whose families or other acquaintances weren't able to help their English studies.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of AUTHORS



A. Nurhan SAKAR is an assistant professor of Management at Open Education Faculty, Anadolu University, Eskisehir, in Turkey. She received her Ph.D. in Management from Anadolu University, IMBA from the, Baldwin Wallace College-USA and BEc in Economics from Anadolu University. She teaches, Management & Organization, Her research interests include management of higher education institutions, managerial issues of small and medium sized enterprises, family businesses, and organizational elements of e-learning environments.

A. Nurhan SAKAR
Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty
26470 Eskisehir, TURKEY
Phone: + (90) 222- 335 0580 #2768
E-mail: nsakar@anadolu.edu.tr



Oznur OZTURK is a research assistant at Open Education Faculty at Anadolu University, Eskisehir, in Turkey. She has an M.A. in Quantitative Methods with emphasis on the activity scheduling, and a Ph.D. in Quantitative Methods with emphasis on cellular manufacturing system. She received her Ph.D. and M.A. in Quantitative Methods from Anadolu University. Her research interests include research methods, production methods, project management and simulation.

Oznur OZTURK
Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty
26470 Eskisehir, TURKEY
Phone: + (90) 222- 335 0580 #3980
E-mail: oozturk@anadolu.edu.tr

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